

A photograph of three young girls in a classroom setting. They are all wearing face masks. The girl in the foreground on the left is wearing glasses and a pink mask, holding a purple Be Girl product package. The girl in the middle is also wearing a pink mask and holding a similar package. The girl on the right is wearing a light blue mask and holding a purple package. They are all looking towards the camera. The background shows other students in a classroom.

# MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT IN ANGOLA

PHASE II

**EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVIDING QUALITY MENSTRUAL  
PRODUCTS AND EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS IN  
BENGUELA, CUANZA SUL, MOXICO AND LUNDA SUL**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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UNFPA Angola and Be Girl would like to recognize the Government of Angola and all national stakeholders from key Ministries and civil society organizations who participated in our continued collaboration. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to improve the dignity and safety of menstruating adolescent girls in Angola and for generously offering your time and expertise in support of the second phase of this pilot initiative of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) to promote gender equality and the empowerment of adolescent girls.

We thank the UNFPA Angola Team, especially Ana Paula Andrade for her key support in conducting the Training of Trainers workshop, the field work, and the Data Collection sessions. We would also like to extend our gratitude to workshop facilitators who conducted the photographic coverage of workshops with girls and boys.

We acknowledge the Be Girl team, in particular Júlia Zandamela, Hortência Franco, Solange Lubrino, and Cristina Brito for their work on the Training of Trainers workshop and contributions to the data analysis.

Finally, we express our thanks to the girls and boys who participated in the second phase of this pilot and shared their insights via surveys and discussions for this report.

UNFPA Angola and Be Girl believe that, by providing menstrual health management information and products, we contribute to fulfilling girls' and women's human rights - specifically reproductive rights - both as a precondition for attaining rights such as health and education, as well as a matter of dignity in its own right.

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## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

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**Be Girl** is a social enterprise that takes a design-driven approach to menstrual health and hygiene so that all girls can understand, own, and love their bodies. Be Girl works to achieve this vision through sustainable, quality menstrual products, age-appropriate menstruation education programs, and transformative messaging for a stigma-free world. Be Girl is headquartered in the US and operates a subsidiary, Be Girl Mozambique, in Maputo.



The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health Agency.

The UNFPA agenda aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda aims to achieve three strategic results: i) zero unmet need for family planning; ii) zero preventable maternal deaths and iii) zero violence and harmful practices against women and girls. The achievement and fulfillment of these rights is a fundamental requirement for the UNFPA mandate to be enhanced and inclusive and sustainable development to be achieved. In Angola since 1978, UNFPA works with its Institutional Partners to increase access to reproductive health (including family planning and obstetric fistula treatment), HIV prevention services, adolescent and youth-friendly services, and empowerment of women and youth. Its mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.



**Government of Angola:** This intervention and study was made possible through the engagement and participation of Ministry of Youth and Sports (MINJUD); Ministry of Education (MED); Ministry of Social Action, Family and Women's Promotion (MASFAMU); Ministry of Health and Provincial Directorates.



## ABOUT THE PARTERS – CIVIL SOCIETY

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**African Youth and Adolescents Network (AfriYAN)** was created to increase meaningful youth participation in Africa's development. Participating youth are committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS and the promotion of youth sexual and reproductive health in Africa.



**MWANA PWO** is an Angolan-based organization founded in 2017 to inspire young women's leadership in sexual and reproductive health through capacity building, leadership and human rights' training. The organization's main interventions focus on pregnancy prevention, contraceptive use, gender based violence and menstrual health management.



**The Youth Support Centre (CAJ)**, created by the Angolan Government through the National Institute of Youth, carries out projects benefitting Angolan youth. CAJ's actions are essentially aimed at the area of adolescents and young people, providing sexual and reproductive health services (family planning consultations, prenatal care, postpartum consultations, laboratory diagnoses and active search for syndromic treatment of STIs); Voluntary HIV Counseling and Testing; Consultations with a reference psychologist for people living with AIDS and mutual aid groups.



**Program JIRO (Youth Informed Responsible and Organized)**, a program developed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the support of UNFPA, which main objective is to provide physical spaces, and jovial and relaxed environments for daily contact with adolescents and young people to allow self-knowledge and self-care practices that benefit sexual and reproductive health.



# INTRODUCTION & METHODS

## Introduction

Adolescent girls in Angola often face dual barriers when it comes to managing their menstrual health with dignity and comfort: a lack of basic knowledge about the menstrual cycle and its relationship to family planning as well as a lack of adequate materials to use during their periods. Coupled with harmful social norms such as social stigma and taboos linked to menstruation, these barriers add to girls' diminished sense of self-worth and an increase in missed opportunities.

Most of girls in Angola currently don't have access to menstrual products or accurate information about menstruation and their bodies. Research and experience have shown that menstrual health is a complex challenge that involves a lack of access to the right products, sanitation infrastructure, and information about menstruation. The impact of poor menstrual health also affects girls' mobility, confidence, and understanding of their bodies, which can inhibit their equitable participation in society.

In Angola, as girls advance through adolescence and into adulthood, this gender equity gap widens. Literacy rates for women stand at just 62% compared to 83% for men.<sup>1</sup> The adolescent fertility rate is among the highest in Africa, with 163 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years.<sup>2</sup> Child marriage by age 18 stands at about 30%.<sup>3</sup> And on a broader level, poverty at the national level is 41%, and it rises to 56% in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> Inadequate resources for basic needs translates into inability to purchase adequate menstrual products, which are often considered non-essential items.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Angola and Be Girl joined in partnership to carry out a menstrual health intervention and learning study in Angola in 2021 through 2022 under UNFPA's Ser Menina Phase II funded by UNFPA Angola.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Inquérito de Indicadores Múltiplos e de Saúde (IIMS), 2015-16. Angola.

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA World Population Dashboard - Angola, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Pobreza Multidimensional em Angola, INE, 2020



Participants of the workshop "Ser Menina Fase II"



## Purpose & Interventions

The primary aim of the study was to assess the benefits of two menstrual health interventions: 1) teaching a series of menstrual health workshops provided to a group of underserved adolescent girls and boys and 2) providing sustainable menstrual products to the female participants.

The boys-only and girls-only workshops were taught using Be Girl's SmartCycle® menstrual education curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Contents included the basic biology of the menstrual cycle, menstrual health and hygiene, how to track the menstrual cycle, the connection between menstruation and reproduction, and rejection of myths and taboos.

During the workshops, the girls were given two pairs of Be Girl's PeriodPanties™, reusable menstrual underwear that includes a mesh pocket to hold a removable washable towel that absorbs menstrual flow. Both girls and boys also received a SmartCycle® hand-held learning tool, designed as a small "clock" with a movable "hand" to enable users to track their menstrual cycles.

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<sup>5</sup> Be Girl SmartCycle® Curriculum. 2019.

## Timeline & Methods

In July 2021, trainers from Be Girl's subsidiary office in Maputo, Mozambique conducted a one-week virtual training of trainers (TOT) for 27 partners based in the provinces of Benguela, Cuanza Sul, Moxico and Lunda Sul. Virtual training methods employing video streaming and webinar technology were used to ensure safety during COVID-19. During the virtual workshops, trainees learned how to teach adolescents about menstrual health and hygiene using Be Girl's SmartCycle® menstrual education workshop curriculum. Trainees received manuals and educational banners to use while they taught the workshop as well as an electronic folder of resources needed for successful project execution and data collection.

After completing their training, the trainers then conducted 45 SmartCycle®

workshops from July 2021 through December 2022. A total of 2,000 adolescent girls and 2,000 adolescent boys from disadvantaged families participated. Of this number, 528 girls and 406 boys participated in this learning study and completed surveys before and after the workshop, so that changes in knowledge and attitudes about menstruation and reproduction could be assessed. The average age of participants was 16 years and 12% of girls reported that they had not yet started menstruating. Workshops took place in schools and community centers located in four provinces: Benguela, Cuanza Sul, Moxico and Lunda Sul. Each workshop reached 15 to 30 participants. Extra time was allotted for limited reading and writing skills.



## Timeline & Methods

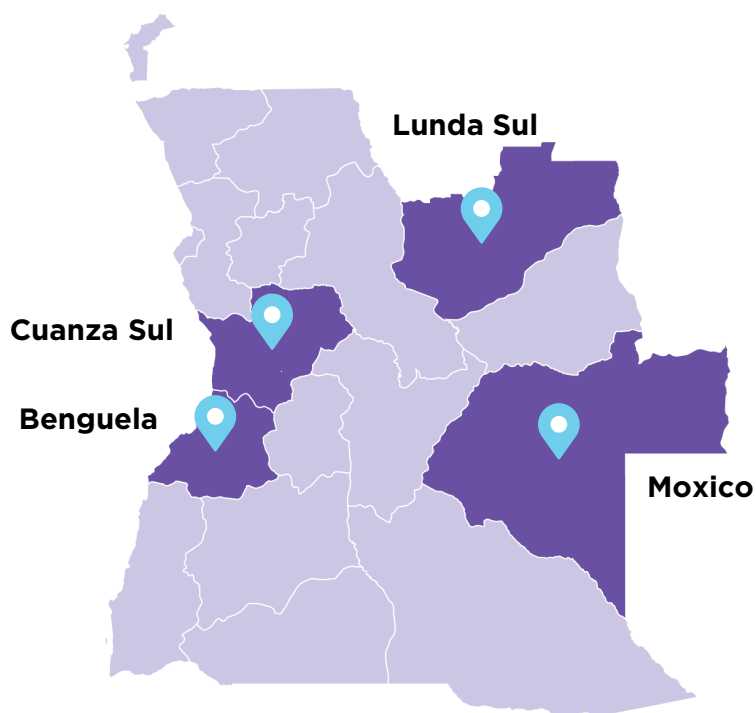
To measure the effectiveness of the workshop and girls' use of menstrual panties over time, project facilitators held 5 focus group sessions involving 49 girls from four provinces (Lunda Sul, Moxico, Cuanza Sul, and Benguela) three to ten weeks after the intervention, which enabled the girls to use the panties and tracking tool in the interim.

For the boys' workshops, the SmartCycle® methodology was adapted to reach boys through an approach called "Building Cycles of Empathy." In addition, the pre- and post-workshop survey questions differed in some cases to better understand gender-specific viewpoints and negative practices such as bullying.

Quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group discussion data were compiled and submitted to Be Girl's Maputo office to analyze and develop recommendations.



Facilitator demonstrating the PeriodPanty™



**AVERAGE AGE: 16**

**SAMPLE SIZE - QUANTITATIVE:**

**528 GIRLS 406 BOYS**



**SAMPLE SIZE - QUALITATIVE:**

**49 GIRLS**



# RESULTS

## Summary of Findings

The quantitative surveys answered by both boy and girl participants before and after the workshops allow us to assess the intervention's effectiveness in educating participants about menstruation and reproductive health and deconstructing myths and negative stereotypes surrounding the issue. The qualitative focus group discussions conducted with girls provide additional insights on the girls' experiences using the PeriodPanties™ and supplement the quantitative data to better understand the impact the workshop had on girls' overall menstrual health.

Data analysis was conducted by comparing pre- and post-intervention quantitative survey responses from boys and girls and examining themes emerging from the qualitative focus group discussions with girls. The following are high-level findings:

### Experiences with menstruation prior to the intervention

#### GIRLS

Girls' self-esteem and ability to participate in daily activities have been negatively affected by their limited access to menstrual products, the existence of cultural taboos, and lack of proper information and sanitation infrastructure. Before the intervention, girls demonstrated incomplete knowledge about their menstrual cycle and reproduction and family planning. These findings are similar to those from Phase 1<sup>6</sup>.

#### BOYS

Boys demonstrated limited and incorrect information about menstruation and reproduction, and some showed negative attitudes about the subject. These results also support findings from Phase 1.

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<sup>6</sup> Ko@erner, E., Zandamela, J., and Duckett, A. (2021). *Menstrual management in Angola: Effectiveness of providing quality menstrual products and educational workshops in Huambo, Huíla, Luanda, and Lunda Sul*



Left: Facilitator explaining the survey to a boy participant. Right: Girls discovering their PeriodPanties™

## Effectiveness of the menstrual product and education interventions

### GIRLS

Like the outcomes from Phase 1, the SmartCycle® workshop increased girls' self-confidence and improved their knowledge of their menstrual cycle and reproduction, with an increase in the number of girls who reported feeling comfortable discussing family planning with a future partner. Additionally, the PeriodPanties™ provided had a positive impact, improving their overall comfort and confidence performing daily activities.

### BOYS

Boys' participation in the menstrual cycle workshop resulted in improved information on menstrual and reproductive health. It also decreased negative attitudes and increased their comfort level when discussing the issue. The findings for boys are in line with the results in the Phase 1 intervention.



Boys holding the SmartCycle® tool.

## Specific Results – Girls, Quantitative Findings

### Menstrual Experience Prior to Intervention – Quantitative Findings

In the entry survey girls filled out prior to the workshop, girls demonstrated limited and incorrect information about menstruation, reported negative attitudes and discomfort discussing the topic, and shared limitations in their daily activities when on their period. Disposable pads were the most common product used, and only 5% reported they were satisfied with how they were managing their periods. The top complaint was that the existing products sometimes leaked or stained their clothes (34%).

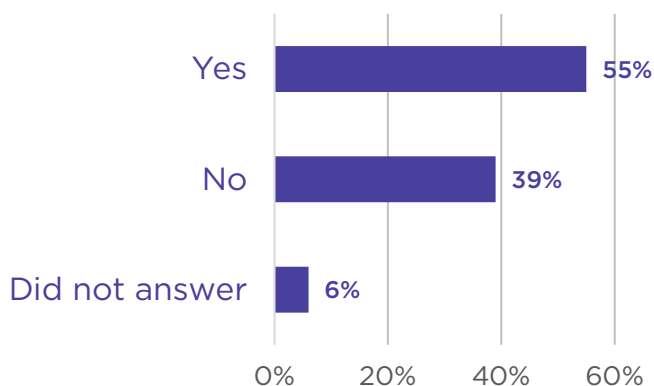
Before the workshop, 42% of girls reported not knowing anything about menstruation prior to their first period (menarche), while 24% saw menstruation as ‘a bad thing’, and 51% felt at least ‘somewhat uncomfortable’ talking about the subject. 46% did not answer or incorrectly answered the question, “What is the first day of the menstrual cycle,” whereas 18% said bleeding is either a sign of the woman being sick or having done something wrong, with 42% not answering that question. Nearly half –

48% of girls reported not knowing the relationship between the menstrual cycle and reproduction, and 13% said there is no connection between them.

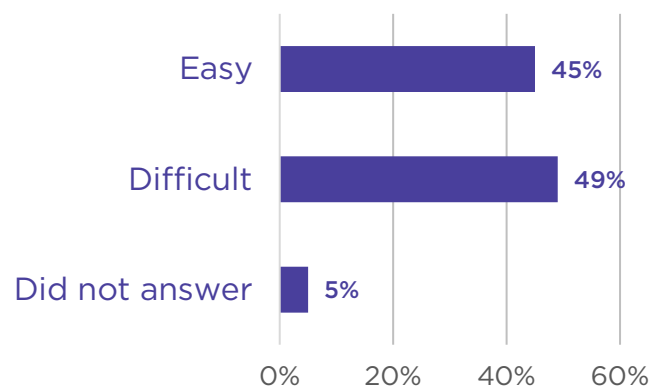
Girls widely reported limitations on daily activities during menstruation. 33% said they did not have sufficient period products. 56% of girls reported they tend to stay home while on their period; 46% said their period makes it hard for them to be active or play sports; 24% said they experience difficulties going to school; and 40% reported having trouble focusing during class.

Additionally, girls shared period-related concerns when managing menstruation at school, with 68% worried about period stains and 36% having boy classmates knowing they are on their period. As for school sanitation infrastructure, 38% said they lacked a private space to change or wash their period products and 49% said they had limited access to water at school.

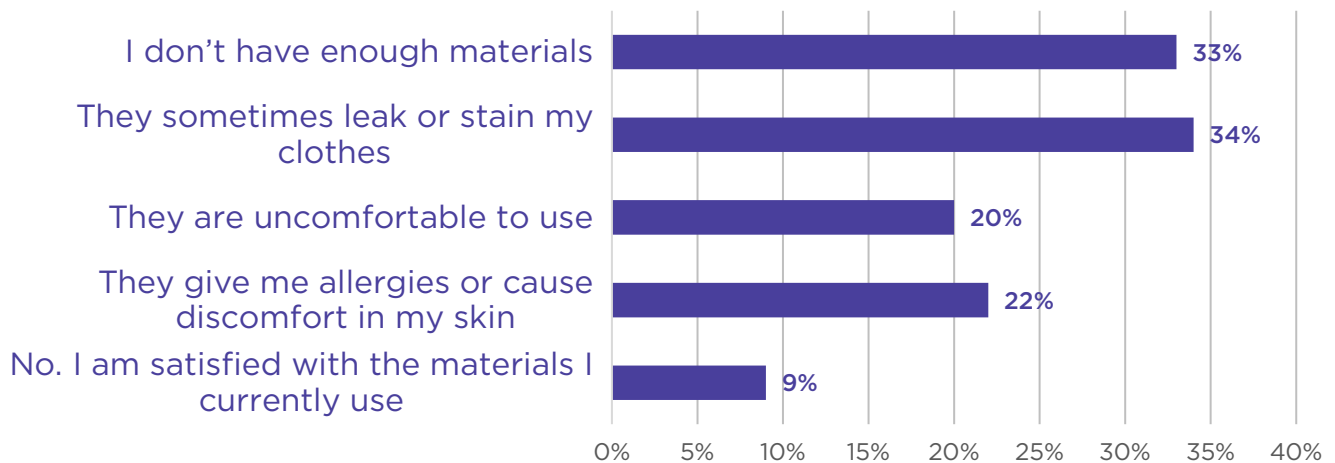
#### I understand how my menstrual cycle works



#### How is your access to water at school?



## Do you have any concerns or complaints about the menstrual products you currently use?



### "When I have my period..."\*

**55%**

I have limited mobility and often stay home.

**45%**

It is difficult to play sports or play with friends.

**24%**

It is hard to go to school.

**38%**

It is hard to concentrate on the lessons.

\*Respondents could choose more than one answer.

**38%**

of girls report to have a private space to change menstrual products and take care of their periods in the school

**49%**

of girls report that it is difficult to access water at school.



1 in 4 girls reported to have missed school because of menstruation during the last year. Of this group, 24% missed school every period.



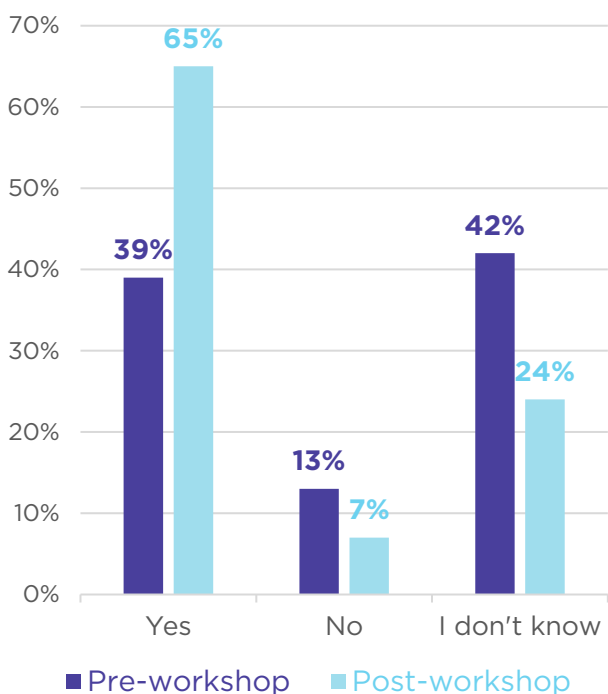
Girls holding their PeriodPanties™

## Effects of Menstrual Education Workshop – Quantitative Findings

Girls' knowledge regarding their menstrual cycle and reproduction increased after participating in the workshop. For example, before the intervention, 40% correctly identified that menstruation is a healthy occurrence; post-workshop, the number rose to 59%, a 48% increase. The percentage who correctly answered that ovulation is the release of the egg from the ovary and mark's peak fertility increased from 43% to 67% post-workshop. Additionally, there was a 67% increase in girls correctly identifying the connection between the menstrual cycle and reproduction ("where babies come from"), which rose from 39% pre-workshop to 65% post-workshop.

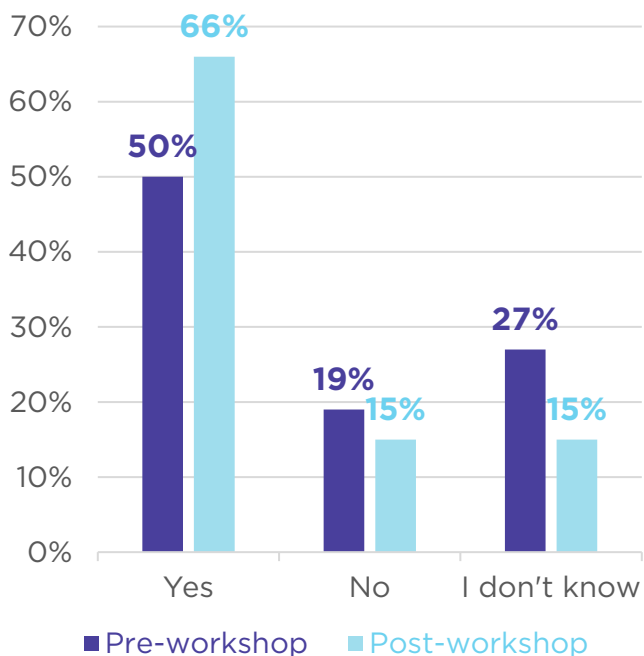
Attitudes toward menstruation took the form of increased confidence. For instance, after the workshop, 85% reported that menstruation is something

### Is there a connection between the menstrual cycle and where babies come from?



positive, up from 71% pre-workshop. The number who reported they felt confident around boys during menstruation rose modestly from 12% to 22%, an 83% increase. And the percentage who reported they felt comfortable talking about menstruation increased from 45% to 67%, a 49% increase.

### When you grow up, would you feel comfortable discussing with your partner whether or not to have a baby?



Attitudes toward reproductive health and family planning also changed. The percentage who stated that husbands and wives together should decide whether to have a baby increased from 73% pre-workshop to 77% post-workshop, a 5% increase. Moreover, post-workshop, 66% said that they would feel comfortable talking with their future partner about the topic, up from 50%, a 32% increase.

## Specific Results – Girls, Qualitative Findings

### Effects of Menstrual Education Workshop – Qualitative Findings

Girls' focus group discussions were held in Lunda Sul, Moxico, Cuanza Sul, and Benguela and provided additional information about the effectiveness of the workshop, giving a more complete picture of intervention outcomes. Most girls said they could recall something they had learned in the workshop, and that the SmartCycle® tool helped them track their periods. Some girls even said they would have liked the workshop to be longer.

When asked if they had used the SmartCycle® tool, most girls said that they did and that they left it at an easy-to-reach place, such as hanging on their bedroom wall or next to their bed. One girl said, “I have been using it, it helps me a lot.”

Girls shared in the focus group that they had learned valuable information about menstrual and reproductive health during the workshop, reinforcing quantitative findings. Girls stated that the workshop changed the way they viewed and felt about their periods, with one of them saying that she used to think that she “had committed a sin and God was punishing her.” Another girl said that prior to the workshop, she used to think her period was a sickness.

During the discussions, girls talked openly about common menstruation-related myths and taboos that they learned were untrue during the workshop. For example, that a girl on her period cannot bake a cake; a woman may get pregnant from talking to men during menstruation; a girl on her period should not water plants; and that menstruation is a sign of disease.

Girls suggested that similar educational sessions be made available to their mothers and more widely to their community, because their mothers often uphold and propagate taboos (e.g., preventing them from cooking when menstruating). During these reflections, multiple girls reported that they intended to use the information they had learned in the workshop to challenge these myths and taboos in the future.

**“We should start groups of girls that will talk about menstruation and address these taboos in their neighborhood.”**



Girls holding their PeriodPanties™

## Effects of Menstrual Product Access – Qualitative Findings

The focus group discussions provided evidence regarding girls' experiences with the menstrual underwear products that they had received several weeks earlier. Most girls shared positive feedback about the panties, citing the menstrual underwear protected their clothes from stains, they looked good, and they felt comfortable and confident while wearing them. One girl said, "I lost track of how many times I used. They were very comfortable." Others remarked:

**“I really liked them, and they were very comfortable. I wore them multiple times.”**

Some girls said that they were nervous at first to use the panty but eventually felt comfortable after finding that the panty protected them:

**“[At first] I was concerned, but now I can confidently say that I wouldn't leave it for anything.”**

**“I really like them and I use them during my period without fear”**

**“They are very comfortable, and I feel very safe since I started wearing them”.**

Several girls shared that they felt more comfortable during menstruation both inside the house as well as participating in school:

**“I felt very comfortable going to school and playing while wearing them.”**

In some cases, girls said the panty size was a problem and questioned whether two panties were enough for them. As a

result of these comments, UNFPA and Be Girl are examining these issues to make any adjustments needed in future interventions.

Most girls stated they have used the PeriodPanties™ multiple times, and that they found them easy to use and comfortable. Some said they were first worried about stains and leaking, but that they felt confident wearing the PeriodPanty™ when they saw this did not happen.

Most of girls said the product was easier to wash and dry than what they were previously using. The majority also said they would recommend the product to a friend or sister, and that if given the choice they would prefer another PeriodPanty™ over a package of disposable menstrual pads. One girl said the product is “very easy and comfortable to use”, while others said that it is “more durable, economic, and more comfortable” than disposable pads.

At the end of the focus group, girls were asked to imagine that they were responsible for designing a “dignity kit” to give to other girls in the community to manage their periods. Most girls said they would choose to include the menstrual panty, and many said they would provide both menstrual panties and disposable pads so girls could choose what they prefer. Girls also mentioned that kits should include soap, detergent, and towels.



Girl holding her PeriodPanty™ and wearing her SmartCycle®

## Specific Results – Boys, Quantitative Findings

### Effects of Menstrual Education Workshop – Quantitative Findings

As was the case for girls, boys' quantitative survey results showed an increased understanding of the menstrual cycle and reproduction. In fact, the positive change seen in boys as a result of the workshop was greater than in girls, which can largely be explained by them having less information on the topic at the outset.

The percentage of boys who reported they understood how the menstrual cycle worked nearly tripled, from 28% to 79%. Pre-workshop, the percentage who

correctly identified what ovulation was stood at 42%. After the workshop, it rose to 73%, a 74% increase.

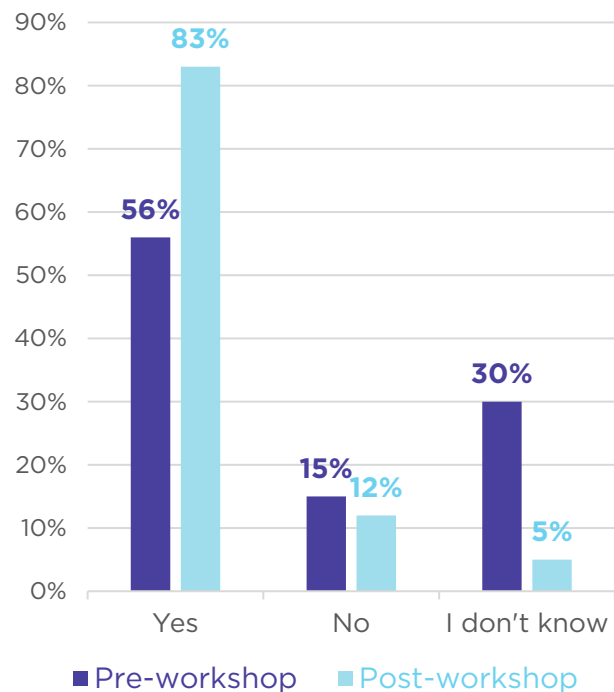
Additional findings revealed substantial increases in knowledge. For instance, pre-workshop, 23% correctly identified that day 14 is the most likely day for peak ovulation in an average 28-day cycle. The number afterwards rose to 47%, more than doubling. In addition, the percentage who correctly identified the general time during the menstrual cycle that a woman is most fertile increased from 19% pre-workshop to 45% post-workshop, also more than doubling.



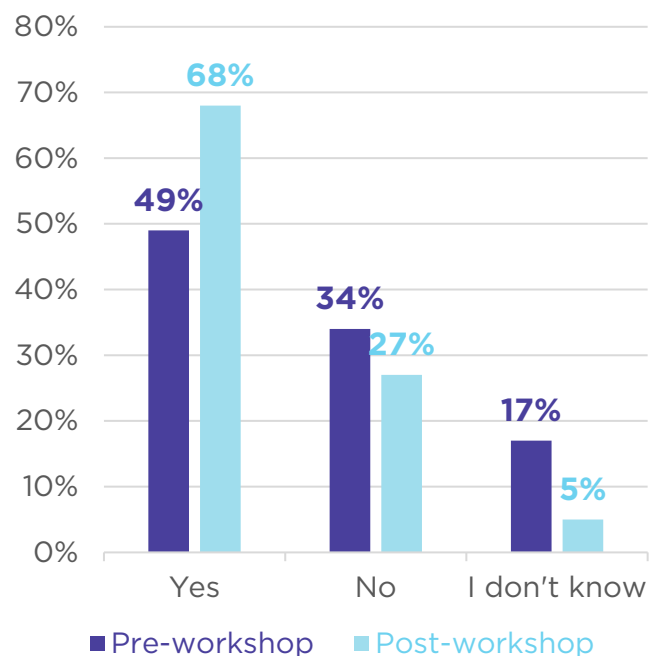
Family planning knowledge also increased. The percentage who said there was a connection between the menstrual cycle and where babies come from increased from 52% pre-workshop to 80% post-workshop, a 54% increase. Before the workshop, 66% stated that husbands and wives together should decide whether to have a baby; the number rose to 71% post-workshop, an 8% increase. And while 47% pre-workshop said that they would feel comfortable discussing with their future partner about whether to have a baby; the number rose to 66% post-workshop, a 40% increase.

Finally, boys' attitudes toward menstruation also changed. Before the workshop, 49% reported it was normal for boys to interact with menstruating girls in comparison with 79% post-workshop, a 61% increase. Also, 38% reported pre-workshop that they would feel comfortable interacting with a menstruating girl and afterwards, 62% said they would, a 63% increase. And the percentage who said boys and men should learn about menstruation increased from 77% pre-workshop to 88% post-workshop.

### Is there a connection between the menstrual cycle and where babies come from?



### When you grow up, would you feel comfortable discussing with your partner whether or not to have a baby?



# RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

## Recommendations

In summary, findings from UNFPA Angola and Be Girl's Phase II collaboration corroborate results from Phase I, providing additional evidence that both interventions contributed to removing menstruation-related barriers and stigmas faced by Angolan adolescent girls. These barriers serve as impediments to gender equality, preventing girls from opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential such as attending school comfortably, participating in social activities, and making informed decisions about their personal health. The Phase I and Phase II findings confirm that targeted menstrual management interventions can play an important role increasing opportunities for equitable participation in society. Based on these findings, we make the following recommendations for actions to be taken:

### **1. Deliver biology-based menstrual education to girls and boys starting at an early age (ideally pre-menarche).**

Educational content should be designed to reduce fear, increase knowledge about both menstruation and reproduction, grow confidence, create trust to engage in dialogue, and build a foundation for girls to have greater control over their reproductive health and, thereby, their futures. Provision of kinesthetic learning tools to track the menstrual cycle offers the opportunity for greater learning about menstruation and reproduction.

### **2. Involve parents, teachers, community leaders, traditional authorities and adolescents themselves in menstrual educational efforts.**

Involving adults who are important

influences in the lives of young people enables them to educate young people and help dismantle stigma and taboos that ultimately are damaging to everyone. Furthermore, adolescents themselves can make important contributions as peer educators and consultants on program decision-making to enhance the effectiveness and uptake of interventions.

### **3. Provide girls with sustainable access to reliable menstrual products.**

When possible, provide girls with menstrual products that are proven to provide safe, sustainable, and reliable protection. When possible, offer girls choices in managing menstruation to enable them to participate in daily life confidently and competently, including their ongoing education.

### **4. At a national level, advocate for the scaling up of collaborative efforts in menstrual health evidence generation and programs.**

Menstrual health contributes towards realizing multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being; 4, Quality Education; 5, Gender Equality; 6, Clean Water and Sanitation; and 10, Reduced Inequalities. Supporting existing policies and creating new initiatives that enable collaborative efforts in research and programming around menstrual health furthers progress towards these goals.

## Conclusion

Given that nearly half of Angola's population of 33.08 million people (as of 2022) is 14 years old or younger,<sup>7</sup> the potential to facilitate positive change nationwide through the provision of critical information around sexual and reproductive health, and respective menstrual health information and support materials, is exponential. Moreover, the opportunity to increase adolescent boys' knowledge about, and support of, menstruation and family planning – including their contribution towards ending stigma and taboos – is just as promising. In combination, the fundamental positive changes that can unfold set the stage for greater gender equality in Angola. And greater gender equality, in turn, can usher in beneficial ripple effects that are felt across all sectors of Angolan society.

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<sup>7</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2016. *Projeção da População 2014-2050*.



**“We should start groups of girls that will talk about menstruation and address these taboos in their neighborhood.”**

Adolescent girl suggestion during focus group discussion, Angola 2022

**“[At first] I was concerned, but now I can confidently say that I wouldn’t leave it for anything.”**

Adolescent girl talking about her Be Girl PeriodPanty™, Angola 2022

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